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Regionalism, Politics, and the Military in Dahomey

SAMUEL DECALO

On 10 December 1969 a faction in the Dahomean army intervened for the fifth time in the troubled political life of the country. Toppling President Zinsou, whom it had more or less foisted upon the nation, the military recalled the political Old Guard whose return they had hitherto unalterably opposed. The upheaval marked the distinct end of an era, the completion of a tortuous nine-year cycle which led Dahomey back to the same political power configuration with which it had started at independence, except for two added distinctions: the continent's first rotating collegiate presidency and the first instance of a president (Maga) reassuming power after being purged by the military.

On 23 March 1972 another faction in the Dahomean army attempted to assassinate the chief of staff, Colonel de Souza, overthrow the Dahomean triumvirate, and bring back the former president (Zinsou). This most recent upheaval underscored the continuation of deep-rooted systemic instability that had in twelve years of independence brought the country four constitutions, eight presidents and the unique Presidential Council, five successful military interventions, and a number of unsuccessful military coups and mutinies.

The purpose of this article is to present a detailed case study of acute political instability in a small francophone West African state. Sharing some of the systemic parameters of neighboring Togo, Upper Volta, and even the Ivory Coast, Dahomey's political development has followed a somewhat different course. The country has experienced a slow, grinding, almost inevitable decay of political institutions, and the erosion of its public and political order from the alleged "golden days" of UPD (Union Progressiste Dahoméenne) elite unity in 1946 through the intense power struggles of Dahomey's patrimonial rulers to the development of what

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appears to be a classical example of a praetorian system.¹ Indeed, the tragedy of the Dahomean experience may well be that it throws doubt on the assumption that all problems are eventually tractable.

Regionalism, Tribal Cleavages, and Political Allegiances

The root of much of Dahomey's instability is the multifracted nature of the social system itself, arising out of the artificial territorial and ethnic configurations imposed by the colonial powers during the dissection of Africa. Within Dahomey's established borders are the cultural successors of two mutually antagonistic kingdoms, Abomey and Porto Novo in the south, and the still largely isolated and unassimilated tribal groups of the north. Through the forces of tradition, with their continuing socialization into old patterns of allegiance, and spurred by French differentiation between them as well as by more recent politicization of residual cleavages by politically ambitious elites, the three potential power constellations have retained much of their sense of historical and cultural distinctiveness and mutual mistrust.

A state of semipermanent warfare had existed between Porto Novo and expansionist Abomey, their last clash occurring in 1891 just prior to the final invasion of the country by the French. Royal power was not abolished until the period from 1900 to 1913 when the thrones were allowed to remain vacant, though modified royal authority was retained through the French practice of appointing cantonal chiefs from members of the royal houses.² Buttressed by their new administrative authority, these individuals provided loci for the coalescence of traditional regionalist sentiments. Justin Ahomadegbe's electoral stranglehold over the Cotonou-Abomey region is due primarily to his descent from Abomey royalty. Hubert Maga, despite relatively low status, claims traditional legitimacy by virtue of his familial connections to the northern kingdom of Borgou. Chabi Mama, the real strong man of the north and an important participant in most coalitions since independence, is a prince of the Nikki Kingdom, while Tahirou Congacou (president of the National Assembly in 1965 and an indispensable northern representative) is a prince of the Djougou Kingdom. In Sourou-Migan Apithy's name, "migan" denotes descent from the powerful chief ministers of the Porto Novo Kingdom.

Even in relatively modern hierarchies (e.g., the army), traditional legitimacy has enhanced modern authority and power. Colonel Philippe Aho, descendent of King Glele, and Major Benoit Adandéjan, great-grandson of King Ghezo, constituted part of the high command "Abomey contingent" and commanded respect and deference from Fon subordinates above that due their rank. Indeed, General Christophe Soglo (head of the

¹ David Rapoport, "A Comparative Theory of Military and Political Types," in *Changing Patterns of Military Politics*, ed. Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Free Press, 1962).

² There are a number of good books and articles on the Dahomean colonial and pre-colonial periods, among others: Robert Cornevin, *Histoire du Dahomey* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1962) and his *Le Dahomey* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965); A. Le Herisse, *L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey* (Paris: Larose, 1911); and Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomey*, 2 vols. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1938). For specialized literature, see the two bibliographies published in *Etudes Dahoméennes* (Porto Novo), nos. 10 and 11 (1968).

army until 1965) commanded less prestige than some of his subordinate officers, despite his personal links to Abomey, though here personality variables also played a role. The link between traditional and modern authority is more visible in the case of descendants of the Abomey Kingdom because of its dominant role in the Gulf of Benin's history and the semilegendary fame of its kings; yet the legitimizing effects of traditional power is equally noticeable in the north. There, social cohesion around Hubert Maga, "the man from the North," enforced by village chiefs and royal princes, has given the region a consistently higher voter turnout than the more educated and politicized south.³

Surpassing the cultural and power cleavage in the south is the chasm between the densely populated south as a whole and northern Dahomey, a sparsely inhabited conglomerate of fragmented and less-advanced tribes. Few kingdoms of any size had emerged in the north, and the region's chronic warfare was more of the intervillage variety.⁴ There had been little contact with the southern tribes (Abomey's ambitions had traditionally been to the east and southeast), and with the French pacification of the region there was even less contact among the northern tribes themselves. Thus the major north-south division in much of West Africa has been especially evident in Dahomey.⁵ The local French officials accentuated the division by treating the two areas as distinct: impeding travel to the north, concentrating infrastructure in the south, and periodically recommending to Paris the creation of separate administrations for the *cercles* of Parakou, Natitingou, and Kandi.

As in other West African states, the more rapid Westernization of the southern elements hindered intranational unity following independence. Southerners pursued educational opportunities so avidly that prior to independence Dahomey was a prime exporter of skilled and literate manpower to the rest of French West Africa. In the north, on the other hand, Muslim chiefs refused to send their sons to French schools and in due time saw the staffing of the northern bureaucracy by Fon from the south. The latter frequently acted with typical expatriate arrogance, disdain, and displeasure at their posting to the "savage north." The regional educational disparity has never been significantly narrowed. As recently as 1967, overall school attendance in Tanguieta, in the north, was less than 13 percent compared to the national average of 30 percent and Cotonou's 90 percent.⁶

Political power in Dahomey rests upon regional allegiances which are

³ Electoral participation in Dahomey has fluctuated from 44 percent in 1951 to 70 percent in 1960 with wide regional variations. In the crucial 1970 presidential elections, for example, voter turnout was between 47 and 62 percent in the south, while in the north it was 79 percent.

⁴ See Jacques Lombard, *Structures du type "féodal" en Afrique Noire: Etude des dynamismes internes et des relations sociales chez les Bariba du Dahomey* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1965).

⁵ In neighboring Togo different climatic-vegetation zones have produced distinct southern, central, and northern tribal groupings of approximately equal size. Also, the existence of the Ashanti Federation to the west and expansionist Abomey to the east effectively curtailed the power potentials of local kingdoms, thus indirectly lessening the degree of traditional ethnic animosities. For details, see Robert Cornevin, *Histoire du Togo* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965) and his *Le Togo: Nation Pilote* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1963).

⁶ *L'Aube Nouvelle* (Porto Novo), 17 December 1967.

especially strong among the traditional elements.⁷ Resembling Lorwin's "segmented pluralism," or Lijphart's closed cultural camps (*verzuiling*), they do not, however, fulfill one of the basic prerequisites for systemic stability in such political systems—interelite cohesion or accommodation.⁸ Hence both the elites and indirectly the cultural groups are involved in a zero-sum game. National identity, in many respects an empty term, is applicable only to urban elements and even there is superimposed, none too securely, over tribal identity.⁹ To most rural Dahomeans it is meaningless.¹⁰ Allegiance and loyalty are bestowed upon those at the national level who are closest to traditional and/or tribal authority. Such links cannot be broken easily. Moreover, as Ronen points out, "those steeped in traditional values are conditioned to accept the permanence of a man in his office."¹¹ This in part explains the permanence of the electoral power of the Dahomean triumvirate and especially that of Maga, despite his deep implication in the mismanagement of national resources during his presidency (1960-63). It also throws light on the remote-control charisma of the triumvirate who, despite an exile of two years (1966-68), were able to torpedo from abroad the 1968 presidential elections (from which they had been barred) by a concerted call for abstention by the electorate.¹²

Based on such a pattern of values, political power in Dahomey has necessarily revolved around a few personalities. Indeed, apart from the towering positions of Ahomadegbe, Apithy, and Maga (representing respectively the Fon of Abomey and Cotonou, the Yoruba and Gouns of Porto Novo, and the Bariba and other tribes of the north), the inner elite probably includes no more than 35 politicians (bosses?) who, irrespective of their "parties" fortunes, are always to be found around the Dahomean power apex.¹³ This is due not to any lack of aspiring politicians but to the

⁷ See Finagnon M. Oke, "Survivance Tribale ou Problematique Nationale en Afrique Noire," *Etudes Dahoméennes*, no. 2 (1967).

⁸ Val R. Lorwin, "Segmented Pluralism: Ideological Cleavages in the Smaller European Democracies," *Comparative Politics* 3 (January 1971): 141-76; and Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) and his "Consociational Democracy," *World Politics* 21 (January 1969): 207-25.

⁹ For some of the theoretical literature and substantive contributions on similar phenomena, see Robert Melson and Howard Wolpe, "Modernization and the Politics of Communalism," *American Political Science Review* 64 (December 1970): 1112-29; Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1963); Martin Kilson, *Political Change in a West African State: A Survey of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966); and Richard L. Sklar, "The Contribution of Tribalism to Nationalism in Western Nigeria," *Journal of Human Relations* 8 (Spring-Summer 1960): 407-18.

¹⁰ See the results of my preliminary fieldwork in 1971 in northern Dahomey: "Preliminary Comments on Political Perceptions in a Traditional System" (forthcoming).

¹¹ Dov Ronen, "The Two Dahomeys," *Africa Report* 13 (June 1968): 56. See also his interesting earlier article, "Preliminary Notes on the Concept of Regionalism in Dahomey," *Etudes Dahoméennes*, no. 2 (1967), pp. 11-14.

¹² According to Ronen, "the initial loyalty of the masses to their traditionally conceived first leader cannot be destroyed," "Two Dahomeys," p. 56.

¹³ The recent proliferation of articles on political clientelism (or patrimonial rulership) in developing nations is a healthy conceptual advance over the previous literature on the relationship between elites and masses in Africa. There is danger, however, in applying the term indiscriminately in all traditional systems, as noted in passing by Rene Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing

inevitable consequence of the modified traditional authority possessed by a handful of leaders, which is quite independent of any modern political power they might also wield. A good example would be Chabi Mama, a Bariba of princely origins, the former deputy mayor of Parakou (his fiefdom), the true power-wielder in the north, and a major figure in all governments to date. Despite being implicated in the mismanagement of resources with Maga and having received a 20-year prison sentence in 1965 for attempts to foment civil war in the north following Maga's demise, Chabi Mama was returned to power as cabinet minister in the Zinsou administration (1968-69). Despite Maga's anger over this "opportunistic" alliance, Mama held an important post in the 1970 Maga government. The fact that the exiled triumvirate was invited to return to Dahomey, though it was their constant intriguing and jockeying for sole power that contributed more than anything else to institutionalized instability, forcefully attests that their vacant political thrones could not be usurped even in their absence.

The rise of regional-personalist parties can be traced to the 1951 elections when two deputies to the French Assembly were scheduled to be elected from Dahomey. In the 1946 elections Apithy, the grandfather of Dahomean politics, had captured the sole seat of Dahomey and Togo. In 1951 Hubert Maga, for 20 years a schoolteacher at Natitingou, exploited northern grievances against southern domination. Appealing to regional and ethnic sentiments he forged an alliance of the northern tribes (Groupement Ethnique du Nord, later to become the Rassemblement Démocratique Dahoméen or RDD) which won him the second seat. The single party (UPD) then in existence promptly collapsed as its three dominant leaders parted ways and established their separate ethnic power bases.¹⁴ The personal ambitions of the three men coupled with the Dahomean tribal structure led to the routinization of political appeals and responses on the basis of primordial loyalties.¹⁵ Regional allegiances had solidified by 1957 with the top contenders fully in command of their fiefdoms, and the

Solidarities in Nation-building," *American Political Science Review* 66 (March 1972): 68-90. A form of political clientelism undoubtedly exists in many traditional and transitional societies, but neither Lemarchand's typology (p. 73) nor the definition of Lemarchand and Legg adequately cover situations where the client-patron relationship is overwhelmingly in favor of the elites. See their "Political Clientelism and Development: A Preliminary Analysis," *Comparative Politics* 4 (January 1972): 149-78. Thus, the majority of the cultivators interviewed in northern Dahomey were extremely skeptical that their support of Maga would result in any benefits for them or their villages. Likewise, most of the political brokers in the small villages (typically the village chief or council of elders) had not benefitted from their activities on behalf of Maga. See Decalo, "Preliminary Comments." For more on this theme, see John D. Powell, "Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64 (June 1970): 411-25; Eric Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship and Patron-Client Relations," in *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, ed. Michael Banton (New York: Praeger, 1966), and G. Roth, "Personal Rulership, Patrimonialism and Empire-Building," *World Politics* 20 (January 1968): 194-206.

¹⁴ Students of the Dahomean scene have an excellent schematic guide to the evolution of Dahomean parties in the addenda of Finagnon M. Oke, "Des Comités Electoraux aux partis dahomeens," *Revue Francaise d'Etudes Politiques Africaines* (August 1969), pp. 45-57.

¹⁵ Glele argues that tribal sentiment was mobilized by the leaders and that regionalism was the result of their ethnic campaign manipulations. See Maurice Glele, *Naissance d'un Etat Noir* (Paris: Pichon and Durand-Auzias, 1969), esp. chap. 10.

election statistics of 1960 illustrate the threefold division of power (see table 1). Though the 1960 election and the 1970 presidential election are not strictly comparable, it is significant that, despite an increase of voters in 1970, the two southern candidates obtained virtually the same support in their strongholds. In both elections Ahomadegbe obtained 72 percent of the vote in Zou while Apithy got 81 percent of the Oueme vote in 1970 compared to 80 percent in 1960. Although the 1970 election was annulled before it was held in Atakora, Maga's stronghold over the north has also remained constant.

TABLE 1
GENERAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS OF 3 APRIL 1960

DISTRICT	TOTAL SEATS	PND		UDD		RDD	
		Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Southeast.....	45	53,912	45	13,432	0	0	0
South.....	35	30,121	20	38,690	15	0	0
Southwest.....	30	24,884	9	33,210	21	0	0
Center.....	45	24,971	10	66,931	35	0	0
Northeast.....	30	0	0	0	0	43,184	30
Northwest.....	40	0	0	6,214	0	49,970	40
Total.....	225	133,888	84	158,477	71	87,154	70

SOURCE: Modification of table in Cornevin, *Dahomey*, p. 76.

NOTES: The party acronyms represent Apithy's Parti des Nationalistes Dahoméens, Ahomadegbe's Union Démocratique Dahoméenne, and Maga's Rassemblement Démocratique Dahoméen. Where no votes are registered, the party had no candidates.

Efforts to create ideological or intertribal parties have been unsuccessful in Dahomey. (In the 1970 four-candidate election, Zinsou, campaigning as the nontribal, nonregional alternative, obtained only 3 percent of the vote.) None of the traditional ingredients of power has been present in such attempts, therefore aspiring politicians have joined one of the established regional parties where fissiparous tendencies have been rife due to diverse ideological positions. The resulting strains, interfactional friction, and opportunistic maneuverings by leaders have immobilized Dahomean parties and prevented them from fulfilling any but the most decorative of roles. Indeed, in each political crisis since independence, the role of the party has been insignificant.

All attempts to establish a one-party system in Dahomey, though "successful" on paper, have only glossed over deep tribal, ideological, and personal divisions; thus their collapse has been rapid. They have provided an artificial unity but left intact the diverse regional and ethnic allegiances.¹⁰

¹⁰ As Zolberg points out, "the latent tendencies of the societies in which these political processes occur militate *against* the one-party state." Aristide R. Zolberg, *Creating Public Order* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), p. 36. See also Oke, "Survivance Tribale,"

Persistent infighting at the power apex and the unilateral one-party legislation indicate that the desire for unity has been greatest on the part of the incumbent of the moment. Institutionalized instability has been the concomitant result.

With ethnic and regional allegiances directed toward individuals commanding traditional or ethnic legitimacy, political parties have been highly personalist.¹⁷ Since the basis of political power is not wholly modern, however, the fall or temporary eclipse of a leader does not erode his power base. The banning of political groupings or their merger within a "national" party merely changes the framework within which the tripartite struggle for supremacy is conducted. Similarly, the collapse of a regime has always resulted in the disintegration of the coalition supporting it, the reemergence of its individual components, and the attempt to create a new coalition. The basic three-power configuration resting on existing social cleavages has shown remarkable persistence over time. Ultimately all that changes is the party nomenclature which merely adds to the epistemological confusion in the Dahomean scene. Insofar as the institutionalization of public and political order is a prime task of all political hierarchies, the Dahomean leadership has failed.¹⁸

Two social groups that have played important roles in Dahomean politics are the unions and the students, for they have directly or indirectly contributed to the demise or instability of each government, though since 1965 the military has increasingly played an open political role. Union membership, though only 3 percent of Dahomey's adult population, includes the majority of the workers in the money economy and is concentrated in the cities—especially Cotonou, the country's nerve center. A strike, especially in the sensitive area of public services, can thus paralyze the country and force the government to its knees.

Union strikes in developing nations are frequently seen as epitomizing materialism and lack of civic responsibility. From the vantage point of a fiscally pressed government, their demands can appear grossly unjustified since unionists are an elite in comparison with the subsistence-economy population. With the government often the major employer (as in Dahomey), a strike is necessarily a challenge to the regime. How the challenge is met depends largely upon the particular tribal configuration of office holders, the personality of the top executive, and the economic parameters. If the regime is already weak, compromise with the unions, even if evidently financially disastrous, may be the result. Such action frequently alienates other powerful groups and aggravates economic conditions leading to eventual austerity measures, and unionists have been the first to feel the effects of such budgetary cuts.

In the Dahomean context the absence of any large extractive or manufacturing industries and the mass tax evasion of merchants and other professionals dictate that domestic deficits be met through new taxes and

p. 7, fn. 9, and Samuel E. Finer, "The One Party Systems in Africa: Reconsiderations," *Government and Opposition* 2 (July-October 1967): 491-508.

¹⁷ For further discussion see Roth, "Personal Rulership."

¹⁸ Zolberg, *Creating Political Order*, p. 35.

salary cuts in the civil service. These have to be large to be of economic value since their base is small, hence the 25 percent salary cuts, elimination of fringe benefits, halving of family and child support, and other decrees.

The alternative to such unpopular measures would be to cut the fat from an obese civil service. Major economies could be achieved in this manner without gravely affecting state services.¹⁹ Yet such action would be virtual political suicide. Back-to-the-land drives aimed at the floating unemployed urban elements have rarely been successful.²⁰ More and more young people gravitate to the cities seeking the "good life"; and in Cotonou alone unemployment is over 20 percent. Redeployment of redundant civil servants has been extremely slow. Freezes in civil service hiring have not stemmed the rural exodus nor made a dent in the 65-80 percent of the budget spent on salaries.

The unionist, though maintaining a standard of living far above that of his traditional compatriots, is caught in an economic vise. Galloping living costs cut deeply into his continuously shrinking income, and often he has to subsidize an extended family or kinship group of over ten souls.²¹ If he demonstrates or strikes, some of his demands may be met, yet economic realities frequently dictate future cuts. Moreover, strikes lower the country's economic productivity and weaken its fiscal base, necessitating new revenue. Inevitably a vicious circle is created: The worker cannot obtain relief from new taxation unless he strikes, and the economic costs of a strike, successful or not, force the government to counter with further fiscal economies.

It is not surprising that the unionists, who have helped to topple a number of regimes, have been unsuccessful in retaining the bulk of the concessions extracted after prolonged union-government confrontation. As each successive administration has come to grips with the nation's economic realities, unionists have been the first to bear the new austerity measures. Union unrest and frustration is frequently aggravated when, with the appeals for union restraint and selflessness, the political elite is viewed as maintaining a sumptuous standard of living. Despite union-government consultations on economic policies and on appointments to the Ministry of Labor, and despite even outright government control, the unions have been consistently at odds with all regimes, including those they had helped to bring to power. The ensuing strikes and civil disorders have either brought in the military as guarantors of public order (in 1963 and 1965) or made the personalist military seizure of power easier (since the first 1965 coup).

Student groups have demonstrated and struck for a variety of reasons not always connected with legitimate grievances. Representing a distinct subculture, students have frequently been led by those with political

¹⁹ According to some estimates 40 percent of the civil service could be disposed of without detriment to state services.

²⁰ "Back to the Land: The Campaign against unemployment in Dahomey," *International Labor Review* 93 (January 1966): 29-49.

²¹ In 1965 minimum wages were raised for the first time by an average of 12 percent while the cost of living had increased by over 47 percent. See *Economist*, 12 June 1965.

ambitions susceptible to outside political influences. Underlying overt student complaints are a deep frustration at Dahomey's client status vis-à-vis France, radical nationalist feelings, and apprehension of an educational system which is preparing them for nonexistent positions in Dahomean society.²² Though student strikes have usually been easily crushed, they have often sparked union upheavals and constitute a direct challenge to the government—all the more galling because of the demonstrators' extreme youth and their privileged (and costly) position in society.

The Economic Dimension

While intense regionalism made possible the three-way political power struggle, economic factors have accentuated the precariousness of all Dahomean regimes. Dwarfing all other considerations is Dahomey's economic nonviability. One of the poorest of the former French West African territories, Dahomey has had an adverse balance of payments since 1924 (exports have covered 31-59 percent of imports since 1960), and the budget has been balanced only with the aid of French subsidies. Following independence major infrastructure building, repatriation of civil servants, and exigencies of running a sovereign state have greatly enlarged the fiscal imbalance while revenues, until recently, remained static or declined. What little industry exists is largely a result of foreign aid that trickles into Dahomey. The frequent states of turmoil and government changes hinder self-generated development and frighten away the little foreign capital available. Union volatility, government inability in restraining rampant inflation, and continued dependence on French largesse all add to the social frustration and unrest.

Until recently the agrarian scene, where improvements are possible, has been stagnant. The 1.4 percent annual rate of growth for 1957-65 was one of the lowest in Africa. The region with some of the most significant agricultural improvements has been the north where the turmoil and excitability of the south is far away. Both traditional authorities and none too subtle governmental restrictions have kept the countryside exodus to modest proportions while transforming peasants to cash crop farmers. There is some validity to the assertion of northern army elements that, but for the diligent efforts in the north, the country's economic condition could have been much worse. The recent discovery of offshore oil shale and continued drilling for exploitable deposits, if successful, could spell the difference between perpetually impending bankruptcy and slow economic development. Nevertheless this pot of gold lies at the end of a long rainbow, and anticipation of better times cannot help administrations with an average life expectancy of less than two years.

Dahomean Musical Chairs, 1960-65

Dahomey's political record since independence consists of shifting and opportunistic alliances between three leaders, each always seeking sole power, and a perpetual struggle between the regime of the moment and

²² It is currently estimated that there are more Dahomean doctors in Paris than in all of Dahomey.

the trade unions.²³ Because of personality differences neither Maga-Apithy (1960 and 1960-63), Maga-Ahomadegbe (1960, linking the most compatible men), nor Apithy-Ahomadegbe (1963-65, pitting southern interests against the north) alliances succeeded. Between 1960 and 1965, when the military took over, virtually every possible civilian combination had been tried and found wanting. Though the specific causes leading to the collapse of each alliance varied, mutual intriguing and jockeying for supreme authority were common to all.

The first serious attempt to form a national coalition occurred in May 1959 when Ahomadegbe's UDD succeeded in eroding Apithy's control over the south and emerged as the major representative of the Abomey voters. Unable to reconcile his differences with Ahomadegbe or to take a subordinate place in a tripartite coalition, Apithy (who had more or less dominated Dahomean politics since he rose to power as the protégé of Father Aupiais) allowed the formation of a government by Maga. As elsewhere in West Africa, the inability of southern leaders to agree brought about the entry of a balancing northern force.

A rapid Apithy-Maga estrangement followed, leading to closer Maga-Ahomadegbe links which were shattered when the latter tried to assume power in the wake of social unrest among unionists and repatriated Dahomeans. Faced with the UDD defection, Maga and Apithy swiftly reconciled, formed a joint party, defeated the UDD at the polls (by drastically revising the electoral system), and proceeded to ban the party and arrest its members. The forceful integration of all political factions into one new party (Parti Dahoméen de l'Unité) only created a superficial political unity. The centrifugal tendencies of the system remained, merely the arena for conflict, within the bounds of the PDU, was changed.

Factional strife rent the PDU from the outset as supporters of the three leaders formed into separate camps. As the balance of power tipped in favor of Maga, northerners in large numbers were promoted throughout the entire governmental system, and the gendarmerie, in particular, was packed with Baribas who often regarded themselves as Maga's private militia. A powerful northern conservative group emerged around Maga, Chabi Mama (PDU secretary-general), and Arouna Mama; and eventually Apithy, officially still a member of the government, was shipped off as permanent ambassador to Paris. The northern takeover was complete.

On 28 October 1963 the First Republic collapsed under the impact of student and union strikes and mass demonstrations. The immediate cause of Maga's downfall was the Bohiki affair which dramatized many of the administration's faults.²⁴ Among these were blatant governmental corrup-

²³ This process is well documented elsewhere. See Virginia Thompson, "Dahomey," *Five African States*, ed. Gwendolen Carter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963); Samuel Decalo, "The Politics of Instability in Dahomey," *Genève-Afrique* 7, no. 2 (1968); and Finagnon M. Oke's two studies, *Sociologie des partis politiques au Dahomey* (Paris: E.P.H.E., 1963), and "Reflexions sur les partis politiques Dahoméens," *Mois en Afrique* (April 1968).

²⁴ The affair involved the murder of a PDU functionary by National Assembly delegate Bohiki and the Assembly's refusal to lift the latter's parliamentary immunity in order that he might be prosecuted. After the military intervention Bohiki was brought to trial.

tion and spending on grandiose projects, such as the Presidential Palace that dominates Cotonou's esplanade, at a period when unionists were being urged to forego salary increases in order to satisfy austerity budget constraints. Following a week of continuous demonstrations the army, headed by General Soglo, intervened and introduced the Second Republic with Apithy as head of state and Ahomadegbe as head of government. Many northerners, including Maga, were subsequently arrested for widespread embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds.²⁵

The Second Republic was equally short-lived, surviving until 29 November 1965. The new regime tried to solve the economic crisis by imposing a variety of austerity measures. Members of the much smaller cabinet and National Assembly had their salaries cut. Civil service salaries were also cut and new appointments and replacements were frozen. Yet on the political level the turmoil characterizing previous coalitions went on unabated. Though an effort was made (especially by Ahomadegbe and his lieutenants) to build a cohesive, militant, national entity out of the new party (Parti Démocratique Dahoméen), each faction sought to strengthen its own position within it.²⁶ Under the best conditions Ahomadegbe and Apithy would have found it difficult to cooperate; under the new constitution with its bicephalous executive, overlap of responsibilities, and checks on unilateral misuse of power, friction was inevitable. Having disposed of the third political contender, Apithy and Ahomadegbe strengthened their power bases for an eventual showdown between them. By early 1965 they were so engaged in undermining each other's authority that day-to-day administration became increasingly difficult. The feuding factions caused deliberate stalemates at all levels of government, and the crisis finally came to a head over the question of which part of the executive controlled appointments to the Supreme Court. When Apithy refused to promulgate Ahomadegbe's nominations, the struggle was in the open. Releasing Maga from prison (in preparation for a northward coalition shift), Ahomadegbe secured Apithy's repudiation by the party executive and on 27 November 1965 was appointed provisional president.

As demonstrations in support of Apithy erupted in Porto Novo, the army was called in to restore order and to impose a curfew. Though these measures were beginning to calm excited tempers, Soglo (who had never gotten along with his Fon compatriot), smarting from a recent public humiliation by Ahomadegbe and annoyed by his closer relationship with Soglo's Fon subordinate, Colonel Aho, ordered the suspension of the constitution and the overthrow of Ahomadegbe. The official reason for the coup was the breakdown of law and order consequent to the constitutional crisis.²⁷ The president of the National Assembly, Tahirou Congacou, was ordered to assume temporary powers and to seek a resolution to the crisis. When he was unable to do so, the sharp increase in partisan tracts and

²⁵ For one good account of the 1963 upheaval, see Emmanuel Terray, "Les Révolutions Congolaise et Dahoméenne," *Revue Française de Science Politique* 14, no. 5 (1964), pp. 917-43.

²⁶ See the analysis of Glele, *Naissance*, pp. 269-81.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

scattered demonstrations calling for the Army to take over permanently led to the third military intervention and Soglo's assumption of executive powers. Several months later in Paris the three exiled leaders made up their differences in front of the newspaper cameras amidst joviality and back-slapping.

Military Rule and Disintegration

The Soglo administration resulted from the failure of civilian leadership and the detrimental effects of political instability on the economy. Impatient with the sterile infighting of the entire postindependence era, the political temporizing, and the avoidance of unpopular economic decisions, the military moved to fill the vacuum, to provide a political cooling-off period, and to enact the drastic policies necessitated by Dahomey's worsening economic situation.²⁸ The second 1965 intervention initiated a new phase in civil-military relations. Hitherto the army had reacted to the internecine political struggle and accompanying civil disorder; in 1965 (and in 1967 and 1969) the military willingly intervened in the political scene, personal ambitions and corporate interests constituting primary motivations. As a regular participant in the political struggle the military was becoming a praetorian army and a major factor contributing to civil strife.

The army, already the least homogeneous in francophone Africa, could hardly escape the effects of politicization once it moved into the center of the political arena. Adopting a no-nonsense stance (at least at the outset) and a plethora of austerity policies, Soglo's preponderantly civilian "technocrat" administration reduced Dahomey's chronic fiscal imbalance. By late 1967, a few months before an internal military convulsion was to topple him, the country's budgetary deficit had been reduced by some 71 percent, though the import-export imbalance had worsened. By that date latent divisions, antagonisms, and personal ambitions had rent the army; and, as illustrated elsewhere, political stability and a decline in corruption are not necessarily (indeed, are rarely) attributes of military rule.²⁹

Soglo's first year in office was relatively successful, though he was accused of nepotism and a prosouthern bias, but by the end of the year this was corrected through the integration of several northerners. The implementation of the inherited austerity measures and further expenditure cuts were partly successful in reducing stress on the Dahomean budget, though army interests were protected with a military man in office. Although the unions repeatedly requested tax reductions and the restoration of former salary levels, no relief was obtained. Indeed, in 1966 a further 12 percent budget cut led to further austerity measures and in September to an immensely unpopular 25 percent "solidarity" tax. A major strike ensued in October, but Soglo's firmness, the strike's limited scope (public sector unions refused

²⁸ Soglo asserted, "The current instability is mainly the result of the economic situation. No matter how skillful the African leaders are, the masses remain dissatisfied. . . . Strong healthy finances are essential to the political stability of the state," *Afrique Nouvelle* 21 April 1966. See also Mirlande Hippolyte, "Coups d'Etat et regimes militaires d'Afrique," *Revue Francaise d'Etudes Politiques Africaines* (September 1969).

²⁹ See Samuel Decalo, "Military Coups and Military Regimes in Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11 (March 1973): 1-29.

to join it), and the military's unity effected its speedy collapse. By January 1967, Minister of Finance Bertin Borna (one of the "progressive" northerners brought into the government to give it a national appearance) could announce that a 61 percent reduction in the annual deficit had been achieved. Eight months later Borna was "frankly optimistic" about the budget, citing a further 25.7 percent decline in the deficit.³⁰

On other domestic fronts a similar emphasis on self-sufficiency and internal development was visible. Though a strong back-to-the-land drive and attempts to deploy redundant civil servants and urban unemployed into rural areas were not overly successful, there was a noticeable decline in the rural exodus. Soglo's Five Year Plan recognized that Dahomey's viability depended upon the expansion, modernization, and intensive development of the agrarian base. Roughly three-quarters of the envisaged expenditure of \$141 million was devoted to that end. Indeed, some of the economic recovery in 1968 and 1969 can be traced to expenditures on agriculture during the Soglo period.

As the austerity measures took hold, union grievances rose and renewed unrest swept the southern cities. This time the military itself was the focus of discontent. Increasing oscillation in policies, growing inefficiencies, blurred channels of command, and lowered civic zeal began to detract from the administration's credibility. Its legitimacy was being rapidly dissipated as corruption seeped in—as if to epitomize that officers and politicians are equally susceptible to greed. These factors and the administration's growing flexibility vis-à-vis the unions placed it on the same footing as all previous regimes in the eyes of the army's junior officers who were restless with the politicized "unmilitary" conduct of Soglo and their senior colleagues.

The army had all along suffered from the same regional-tribal cleavages so prominent in Dahomey. Superimposed on these was intense intergenerational friction frequently compounded by differences in education (separating the so-called professionals, graduates from St. Cyr and other staff schools, from officers who had risen from the ranks) and cultural outlook. These differences had already resulted in at least one mutiny by 1963.

Within the command hierarchy an Abomey clique revolved around Colonel Philippe Aho and the majors Benoit Sinzogan, Benoit Adandéjan, and Jean-Baptiste Hacheme (as noted above, Soglo is from Abomey). The first two officers were directly involved with the Soglo administration; Hacheme had been the arbitrary, haughty, and rough military prefect of Parakou following the pro-Maga disorders of 1964 after his dismissal; and Adandéjan, as director of security services, has been referred to as the "Beria of Dahomey."³¹ Colonel Alphonse Alley, Soglo's amiable chief of staff, a Basila from the central-north yet one of the few northerners popular in the south and trusted by the unionists, was loyal to Soglo (despite numerous disagreements on policy) and was thus regarded as

³⁰ The 1965 deficit was 1.3 billion CFA francs; in 1966, 501 million; and in 1967, 372 million—a two-year budgetary imbalance reduction of 71 percent.

³¹ René Lemarchand, "Dahomey: Coup within a Coup," *Africa Report* 13 (June 1968).

part of the Soglo group. Thus the entire core of the Abomey clique (including Alley) was either due to be purged or have its authority greatly circumscribed in the event of a power shift.

The northern elements eventually led by Major Maurice Kouandete, were more loosely organized. Distinctly a minority and largely excluded from high command, several of them viewed with distaste the Fon dominance of the intermediate and upper ranks (14 of 90 officers were northerners). Meanwhile, the gendarmerie, extensively packed with northerners by Maga, had developed divergent political orientations which unsettled the military hierarchy. When the army retired from the political scene, a military officer (Sinzogan) was appointed head of the police to prevent future developments of this nature.

The personal ambitions of several of the more aggressive officers further complicated the regional-intergenerational differences. Kouandete, a Somba of Gaba District, had long been building his power base among the junior and northern ranks. Bolstered by his popularity, he had on several occasions directly challenged Soglo and Alley. Austere and puritan in outlook, though crafty and highly ambitious, he was removed from his twin command over Soglo's palace guard and the security services following falsified intelligence reports designed to discredit the Abomey group.³² Appointed as Alley's *chef de cabinet*, he frequently opposed his superior at staff meetings, thus polarizing it into increasingly distinct and antagonistic factions.

Colonel Aho, domineering and sublimely confident descendent of King Glele, utilized his influence in the Abomey group to entrench his own position. He was the only officer in Soglo's cabinet (minister of defense), a position he flagrantly used to promote his own and southern interests. Embarrassed by Aho's conduct and already under serious fire for his administration's prosouth bias, Soglo finally transferred Aho to another position.

As long as the military was confined to regular security and garrison duties, lines of command remained intact and divisions were latent; the hierarchy and its game rules were accepted. The entry of the military in the political vortex changed all this, and with politics banned, the military itself became the prime political arena for both military and civilian factions. The tripartite power struggle infiltrated the army and affected the allegiance of some of the more politicized elements. As the military stayed exposed to political influences, centrifugal forces enhanced existing cleavages and created new ones; thus a tension developed between the barracks officers and those directly or indirectly involved in the administration.

To the masses the military as an institution was in power; grievances, charges of corruption, unrest, and dissatisfaction were voiced without distinguishing between Soglo and the bulk of the armed forces. The prestige and popularity of the army were directly linked to the success of Soglo's regime. A challenge to the latter was a reprimand to the military as a whole. Given the attitudes of the younger, more militant northern "professionals"

³² Heads of the security services were many during 1966-69; among others the following occupied this sensitive post: Major Benoit Adandéjan (Abomey), Captain Ferdinand Johnson (Abomey), Major Maurice Kouandete (north), Captain Augustin Adjano-houn (north), Lieutenant Arcade R. Kitoy (north), and Major Chasme (Abomey).

regarding the competence of their senior officers to command (let alone rule the nation) and the existing tensions and personal ambitions, it was hardly surprising that the civil disorders of December 1967 broke their nominal allegiance to officers who were seen as discrediting the good name of the army. The administration's early prosouth bias, Colonel Aho's conduct while in the cabinet, Soglo's "unsoldierly" manners, spreading corruption which Soglo appeared to ignore (but from which many officers benefited), the alleged unpopularity of Soglo's wife, and the governments' growing inability to provide strong leadership—all alienated some of the more militant army elements, more conscious than their senior colleagues of the dignity of their uniform and ambitious to impose their own solutions on the country.³³

Reflecting the restlessness of the middle and junior ranks and triggered by a desire to control government activities more closely, a Military Vigilance Committee was set up in April 1967, contrary to Soglo's original wishes. The MVC slowly became a government within the government. Members were nominally appointed by Soglo and rotated every six months to avoid the entrenchment of vested interests. The first president of the MVC was Major Sinzogan, with Major Kouandete serving as vice-president. The creation of the MVC was accompanied by the dissolution of the only civil-military advisory body in the country (the National Renovation Committee set up in December 1965), contrary to an earlier pledge that civil-military channels of communication would be tolerated. Psychologically its dissolution weakened the military's legitimacy in office. Totally unbuttressed by civilian organs (even if of secondary importance), military rule tends to become volatile and unstable. The elimination of the NRC widened the social gap between rulers and ruled in Dahomey.

The MVC rapidly fell prey to the divisions already within the military and to the corruption it was to combat. Consisting of 15 middle, junior, and noncommissioned officers, the MVC remained under the control of its Fon members, who ignored the personal ambitions of the younger officers who had pressed for its creation. Factional differences were thus sharpened by the junior officers' hostility over the larger share of influence and economic spoils acquired by some of the MVC's ranking members. Following the 1967 upheaval, numerous MVC members (mostly southerners) were purged for embezzlement and corruption.

On 8 December 1967, shortly after Soglo's unfortunate hope-arousing speech on his return from France, the 35,000 members of the primary schoolteachers' union staged a 48-hour strike over their salary demands. Overreacting, Soglo issued Decree 36 which banned union activities due to the "persistent misuse of trade union rights," an act that immediately inflamed other unions spoiling for a major confrontation. The next day employees of the private sector joined the strike demanding repeal of the solidarity tax. A general strike was announced for 13 December. Faced with an imminent, complete economic paralysis, Soglo temporized and finally capitulated. Decree 36 was repealed and, with Sinzogan and Alley acting as mediators, the strike was called off with the understanding that

³³ Soglo's wife combined "the narrowmindedness of the *petite bourgeoisie* with the prejudices of the *petite blanche*," according to Lemarchand, "Dahomey," p. 53.

the government would "reexamine" the entire tax structure in order to provide economic relief to the unionists.

The union-government agreement constituted the last straw for the group that had coalesced around Kouandete. Rejecting a scheduled Alley-Sinzogan-MVC meeting to explain the compromise, Kouandete and Kerekou with 60 paracommandos mounted their anti-Soglo offensive on the 17th. Soglo, Alley, Sinzogan, and Aho were accused of "shirking their duties" and following a "policy of appeasement" vis-à-vis the unions; the latter three officers were placed under house arrest. Soglo escaped to the French embassy and soon joined the exiled trio in Paris.³⁴

The Zinsou Experiment

Toppling Soglo's government was far easier than deciding what to do next. Kouandete's young putschists were divided on most issues, even including the advisability of remaining in power. Though Kouandete and some of his supporters urged the installation of a new military administration, the adamant refusal of the rest to continue compromising the army's prestige and the strong unionist, student, and intellectual opposition precluded serious consideration of this option.³⁵ The military had assumed power in 1965 with considerable public support. Soglo's largely civilian regime, despite its faults, seemed but a minor deviation from constitutional legality. The 1967 coup, however, represented an internal reshuffling of power in the military, sanctioned by force alone. The clique that emerged apparently dominant consisted mostly of northerners, a fact that aroused uneasiness in the south, especially in the unions which were quite aware of the triggering cause of the coup.

The option of remaining in power precluded, many argued strongly for immediate normalization of the political picture. France had icily ignored the coup's leaders and suspended all aid to the new regime. The treasury was virtually empty and only restoration of legitimacy could assuage French ire and unfreeze French subsidies.³⁶ Extended consultations at Camp Ghezo, in which unionists participated, resulted in a two-to-one vote for a civilian government with an interim administration under Alley who was trusted in the south. Accordingly Alley became the provisional president of the provisional government and continued as chief of staff, both positions originally reserved for Kouandete.³⁷ Alley's return did not, however, result in a balanced cabinet: Eight of the ten ministers were military men and the majority were northerners.

³⁴ For excellent documentation of the coup, see *West Africa*, 23 and 30 December 1967 and 6 January 1968.

³⁵ Also, a significant section of Fon officers feared that a Kouandete military administration would threaten their personal advancement and Fon dominance in the armed forces.

³⁶ There were only 50 million CFA francs in the treasury with a payroll of 300 million CFA francs due shortly.

³⁷ For Kouandete's original appointees to the provisional government (immediately following the coup) and the changes following Alley's assumption of power, see Robert Cornevin, "Les militaires au Dahomey et au Togo," *Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines* (September 1969).

In March 1968 the Constitutional Commission headed by Ignatio-Pinto, president of the Supreme Court, presented its draft of the new constitution. The document provided for a strong single executive coupled with entrenched guarantees of civil liberties. It was duly approved by 92 percent of the voters despite pockets of negative voting in Ahomadegbe's strongholds.

Rumors that the triumvirate would be excluded from the new presidential elections were confirmed when only five individuals cleared the Electoral Commission's hurdles, among which was the disqualification of all members of former administrations.³⁸ The most prominent of those rejected was Emile Derlin Zinsou, who had served previously as foreign minister. Only two of the remaining five could be regarded as real candidates.³⁹ None had charisma or regional or national support, though Adjou reportedly ran with Ahomadegbe's blessing. The elections followed a campaign marked by appeals by Maga and Apithy for a total boycott and resulted in a stunning repudiation of all five candidates with 73 percent of the voters staying away from the polls.⁴⁰ The military annulled the elections and retreated to Camp Ghezo to ponder their future course of action.

The obvious conclusion the young junta might have reached at this stage was that they should withdraw from the political arena and allow Dahomey's political giants to return to their thrones. This view was strongly pressed by Alley, but to no avail. Outvoted on the succession crisis issue, Alley was slowly reduced to the role of a mouthpiece for the true power—Kouandete. In any case, after consultations with unionists, intellectuals, and civil servants, the military announced its decision: Zinsou was to be the next president of the republic.

The announcement was somewhat surprising. Zinsou had always been much more popular abroad than at home because of his urbane cosmopolitan manner, conservative policies, and extensive contacts in Paris and the West.⁴¹ Though neutral in the tripartite division of power (he belonged to neither bloc and had participated in the governments of Maga, Apithy, and Soglo), he was regarded as the epitome of the Old Guard and the "French group" by student groups and some unions. The military had no particular love for him either; indeed, they lumped him in the same category with the exiled triumvirate. On his part Zinsou was a staunch antimilitarist who did not hesitate to indicate his total disapproval of the December coup which he regarded as grossly illegal, and he had refused

³⁸ The constitutionality of the trio's exclusion was challenged by the Supreme Court, but the military set aside the pronouncement. See Decalo, "Politics of Instability," p. 26, fn. 39.

³⁹ *L'Aube Nouvelle*, cited in *West Africa*, called the other three candidates "fantasy candidates." For profiles and data on the election, see *West Africa*, 27 April 1968, and *Afrique Nouvelle*, 18 and 25 April and 2 May 1968.

⁴⁰ See *Dakar-Matin* 8 May 1968, for the results. Adjou, the winner received 241,273 votes out of an electorate of 1,138,388 and 295,667 actual votes.

⁴¹ There has been considerable debate as to whether Zinsou was Washington's or Paris' man in Cotonou. Though France was originally satisfied with Zinsou's appointment, his independence once in office alarmed some French officials and they did not seriously support him once he ran afoul of the military. Indeed, all along Maga was France's choice for president.

to be associated with the Alley-Kouandete provisional government when invited to stay on as foreign minister. Moreover, his disapproval of military coups and military regimes extended to General Eyadema in Togo, whom he regarded as an assassin (Eyadema had killed Olympio) and a usurper. This negative view of the Togo regime irritated some Dahomean officers (e.g., Kouandete) who admired the Eyadema regime as an example of enlightened and stable military rule (the kind which eluded them in Dahomey) and others who had built profitable smuggling relations with their compatriots across the border. With the treasury quite empty and the urgent need for someone acceptable to Paris, however, the military was willing to reverse itself and so decided that Zinsou would do quite well after all.

A barrage of abuse from Paris greeted the military announcement, and speaking for the trio Ahomadegbe called for "an end to the avalanche of illegal actions that Dahomey had witnessed since 1965."⁴² Disillusioned in their expectation of a regal invitation to return to power, the triumvirate mobilized for another demonstration of their supporters' loyalty. Calling for the rejection of Zinsou, a National Front for the Struggle for Democracy was created in Paris in coordination with 22 political and union leaders in Dahomey who pledged "not to participate in any government, not to accept the authority of any President who is unacceptable by any of the living forces and the people of Dahomey."⁴³ Yet within a week of Zinsou's designation as president, a groundswell of support for him emerged. Four of the major unions signified "conditional acceptance" of his suggested programs, and cracks appeared in the triumvirate's domestic apparatus when several of their prominent followers coalesced to support Zinsou.

As opinion in Dahomey polarized into pro- and anti-Zinsou camps, the triumvirate announced their imminent return to Cotonou, causing jitters in the badly divided army. As welcoming delegations poured into the airport from all parts of the country, the army denied the plane landing rights and warned that it would be shot down if it intruded into Dahomean air space. Fearing a clandestine Napoleon-style entry from Togo (where the trio finally landed), with its consequent round of demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, and a virtually certain military mutiny, Dahomey's borders were closed and heavy security guards were posted at all checkpoints and at the airport.

On 28 July 1968, amidst contradictory rumors, tract warfare, and army indecision over vacating the political arena (only strong union, student, and intellectual pressure circumvented a counter-coup and a second permanent military regime), Zinsou was confirmed as president via the legitimizing plebiscite he had demanded. Of the registered electorate, 72.6 percent went to the polls and 76.4 percent cast affirmative votes. For the first time in Dahomean history over half of the registered voters (55.2 percent) supported the winning candidate, despite massive appeals and invective from Lomé. The abstentions and negative votes emanated from

⁴² Cited in *Civilisations* 18, no. 2 (1968), p. 302.

⁴³ *Afrique Nouvelle*, 4 July 1968.

the triumvirate's strongholds; in Porto Novo, for example, 75 percent of the voters rejected Zinsou.

Zinsou's 17 months in office were characterized by 3 distinctive yet linked processes: (1) increased factional infighting in the army; (2) a significantly improved economy, and (3) the slow erosion of Zinsou's power leading to his downfall on 10 December 1969. With the military back in the barracks and outside the national spotlight, a major settling of accounts was in order to recognize the rise of Kouandete as de facto strong man of Dahomey and the eclipse of Alley, nominal chief of staff. Involved and rebuked for his role in anti-Kouandete maneuvers in April 1968, Alley was officially given six months leave of absence after the resolution of the succession crisis, while Kouandete moved in to head the army. In May 1969 Alley was posted to the Dahomean embassy in Washington as military attaché, a largely superfluous post specially created for him. Bitter at being misled into believing he would be appointed secretary general of national defense in the Zinsou government and conscious of the obvious ploy to eliminate him from the power hierarchy, Alley refused his diplomatic assignment and was promptly dismissed from the army by a disciplinary court for refusing to obey orders.

Alley's expulsion from the army's power apex was accompanied by increased powers for his rival, Kouandete. Succeeding Alley as permanent chief of staff, Kouandete was soon named military prefect of Cotonou (where he helped Zinsou disperse the May demonstrations) and on 1 October 1969 he was promoted by special decree to lieutenant colonel. Despite these happenings, Alley's eclipse did not erode his strength and influence in the military, rather it only aggravated tensions and led to yet another split in the army.⁴⁴

On the night of 11 July 1969 an alleged kidnapping attempt was mounted against Kouandete by a former Soglo aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Bouraima. The attempt itself was amateurish and resulted in the arrest of over a dozen officers and former Colonel Alley. The trial before a specially constituted Security Court focused attention on the increased unrest in the military. Though the prosecution, in demanding 20 years imprisonment for Alley and Bouraima, tried to prove the existence of a master plot against Zinsou, Kouandete, Sinzogan, and the security of the state, a judicious examination of the evidence disclosed only a possible plot to kidnap Kouandete. According to Bouraima, military elements close to Alley were disturbed by rumors of a file of blacklisted personnel in Kouandete's possession; their aim had been to question him regarding the file and to obtain his assurance that it would not be used to hurt their professional advancement.

Though Alley and Bouraima were finally sentenced to ten years each, the nature of the trial and the composition of the court drove a deep wedge between Kouandete and Zinsou. From the outset Kouandete had demanded a military tribunal. Zinsou's concern for legality (enhanced by the international attention the case received) precluded such course of action (Alley

⁴⁴ See "Dahomey: Reglements de comptes entre officiers supérieurs," *Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines* (January 1970), and Samuel Decalo, "Dahomey, 1968-1971: Return to Origins," *Genève-Afrique* 10 (Summer 1971): 76-91.

was now a private citizen) which would have resulted in a stiff sentence (death, according to reliable informants) from his enemies. Zinsou's compromise, a mixed Security Court including two officers, was successfully challenged by the defense, and the resultant all-civilian court handed down, in Kouandete's opinion, criminally low sentences.

Alley's imprisonment heightened military tensions even more, and in the remaining months before the December 1969 coup several attempts against Kouandete's life led to a general stiffening of the hitherto lenient Zinsou regime. The automatic weapons used in two of these assaults appeared to corroborate the chaotic dissension within the army, though in rumor-prone Cotonou one speculation was that Kouandete had planned the attempts to create a crisis atmosphere prior to a personal coup. Whatever the truth, the deterioration in public order was a prime argument used by Kouandete when he moved against Zinsou on 10 December 1969.

On the economic plane the Zinsou administration significantly decreased budgetary and trade imbalances. Through a stringently controlled austerity budget, a nearly complete freeze on civil service replacements, a small reduction in the military, and the first serious major crackdown on the wide-scale smuggling and tax evasion, a semblance of budgetary balance was achieved by late 1969. Attempting to evoke a responsive chord of national pride, Zinsou stressed the theme of "a balanced budget by 1970," a goal which appeared attainable with the annual deficit down to a mere 50 million CFA francs in 1969. The import-export gap similarly improved with exports accounting for 45 percent of imports, a ratio, even if still low, unequalled since 1961. Essentially for the first time the Dahomean economy seemed close to orthodox fiscal equilibrium, and none too soon since French budgetary aid was to end in 1970 or 1971.

The very measures that promoted fiscal order also contributed to the erosion of Zinsou's popular support. The constant pruning of the budget, new taxes on commodities mostly sought after by Westernized elites (cars, gasoline), cuts in family and child allowances, and the crackdown on the tax evasion and smuggling activities of the Port Novo merchants alienated those groups that might have sustained the regime. Zinsou's harsh and uncompromising stand vis-à-vis the student demonstrations in January and May, more than anything, alienated the urban middle class by threatening their children's educational and employment future. Zinsou was not so much a politician, with an eye for potential allies or enemies, as an astute administrator, an uncompromising believer in "right" and "wrong" and budgetary orthodoxy; moreover, he tended to rely too much on the army's pledge to maintain him in power for a full five-year term.

Late in 1968 and early in 1969 the austerity measures provoked serious strikes. With most expenditures cut to the bone, in May Zinsou announced drastic cuts in child allowances which would have halved the impending budgetary deficit. Furious strikes again erupted in the southern cities among unionists and students (the latter had been spoiling for a confrontation since their January humiliation by Zinsou). The strikes were quelled only with army help, and Zinsou had to compromise on the allowance cuts.

Despite his strong leadership and largely honest administration, Zinsou's days were numbered. He had fallen afoul of the unions, the urban popula-

tion, and the strongest and most ambitious officer in the military, Kouandete, who aspired to be president. Zinsou's highly "independent" actions, his concern for legality in the Alley trial, his "insensitivity" to Kouandete's "suggestions," his belief in an apolitical role for the military, and his antagonism toward the Togolese regime grossly offended Kouandete, who felt he had elevated Zinsou from obscurity to the presidency and as "arbiter of power, what he gave he could take away."⁴⁵ Possibly Kouandete's rapid promotions and emergence as spokesman for the lower ranks had given him a distorted and exaggerated sense of his potential power. In any case on the morning of 10 December 1969, as Zinsou's car approached the presidential offices, it was stopped by Kouandete's devoted protégé Lieutenant Kitoy and Zinsou was spirited away to Natitingou, a northern garrison town and the home of both Kouandete and Maga.⁴⁶

Back to Origins

In justifying the coup, the handiwork of a small circle in the army, Kouandete argued that the Zinsou regime had "created total insecurity" in the country and had "deliberately ignored the directives" left by the army before its pullout from political life.⁴⁷ But Kouandete had overplayed his hand. His motives were suspect among most of his colleagues who were also incensed that he had not consulted them prior to his action; and some of the ranking Fon officers had viewed with apprehension his meteoric rise and Alley's eclipse and were only waiting for an opportunity to torpedo their chief of staff's aspirations.

For three full days the entire command corps met under tense circumstances to deliberate the coup and their future course of action. Kouandete's request that he be appointed interim president pending normalization was rejected. He was also denied the chairmanship of the Military Directorate finally set up as Dahomey's provisional executive. The directorate was composed of the three colonels heading the police (Sinzogan), army (Kouandete), and Department of National Defense (Paul-Emile de Souza); the latter, the moderate, apolitical, and oldest colonel (who in typical Dahomean style was soon to develop leadership style and personal ambitions), assumed the chairmanship. Kouandete found himself boxed in by two southerners. He also had to witness the rehabilitation of another southerner, Major Chasme (purged for embezzlement in 1967), who became head of the security services. Shortly afterward a general amnesty of political prisoners brought about the release of Alley, the restoration of his rank and decorations, and his promotion to full colonel. When Zinsou's cabinet re-

⁴⁵ *West Africa*, 20 December 1969. For a fuller discussion of the Zinsou regime, see E. Makedonsky, "Nouvelle Tentatives de creation d'un parti unique au Dahomey," *Mois en Afrique* (September 1969). See also Samuel Decalo, "Full Circle in Dahomey," *African Studies Review* 13 (December 1970): 445-57.

⁴⁶ Kitoy has been at Kouandete's side at almost every juncture between 1968 and 1972. Replacing Captain Adjanohoun as director of the army's security services, it was he who forewarned Kouandete of the Bouraima attempted kidnapping, arresting the plotters. After his role in the Zinsou ouster, he was the main instigator of the 1972 Ouidah barracks mutiny and in the attempted coup shortly before the 1972 presidential succession.

⁴⁷ *Le Monde*, 11-17 December 1969, weekly summary.

fused to stay on in an interim capacity without Zinsou, necessitating the division of the portfolios among the directorate, the least sensitive and important were allocated to Kouandete. Zinsou, released from Natitingou, immediately called for a public debate with his opponents over the reasons for the coup. The challenge was not accepted lest the army be forced to admit a past error.

After further stormy meetings the disorganized military, in desperation, reversed itself, invited home the exiled triumvirate, and scheduled new elections for March 1970. This was an admission that the army, divided as it was, could no longer dictate the course of political life in Dahomey. Yet ambitions were not fully curbed by this decision. When it became apparent a few weeks later that the returned triumvirate would not support a single candidate and that the old bickering might reassert itself, Sinzogan and Kouandete clashed as they attempted to seize power. Their efforts were reportedly quelled in a tense meeting of the officer corps during which each faction had its armed personnel outside the conference room.⁴⁸

All four ex-presidents presented themselves as candidates and a lively election followed. During the actual polling intimidation, bribery, illegal distribution (or nondistribution) of electoral cards, and appeals to tribal allegiance were common. Military factions participated openly in these activities on the side of their favored candidate. The staggered voting schedule (designed to allow the army and police greater control over voting abuses) and the ethnic-oriented results resembled elections of regional leaders rather than of a national president.

The results vividly confirmed the tribal-regional basis of power in Dahomey. Significantly, the percentage of votes each candidate obtained in his core area in 1970 was virtually the same as in 1960. Ahomadegbe's strength floundered somewhat though he still finished first. Apithy found his apparatus rent by divisions, but his campaign was unique: he was the first to declare himself a candidate and antagonized the Council of the Entente by blaming it for many of Dahomey's economic problems; he promised to eliminate the solidarity tax without specifying the means; he applauded the army's annulment of the elections when it was apparent Maga and Ahomadegbe were ahead of him; and he tried to seduce key officers into setting up a joint civil-military government with himself as premier. Finally, with the country reeling under the threat of a northern secession following the annulment of the elections, he did not deny rumors that Porto Novo might also secede to Nigeria.

Zinsou, the one candidate without a tribal base, was humiliatingly crushed. Maga, who obtained a mere 24,000 votes in the entire south, received a smashing endorsement of 128,000 votes in Borgou alone where 97.3 percent of the 78 percent turnout was for him.⁴⁹ As usual, there was a much heavier turnout in the north generally when compared to the average 50 percent in the south. As Maga prepared to deliver yet another massive vote in the last district, northwestern Atakora, de Souza intervened, suspending and

⁴⁸ *Africa Report* 15 (April 1970): 6.

⁴⁹ Final voting results, minus Atakora, were: Ahomadegbe—200,092, Apithy—176,828, Maga—152,551, and Zinsou—17,653. See *Afrique Contemporaine* (May-June 1970).

then cancelling the elections on the grounds of growing violence and disorder in the north.⁵⁰

The April 1970 crisis was the most ominous Dahomey had ever faced. Denied his victory Maga refused to budge from his headquarters in Parakou where an Assembly of the Northern Populations was convened. His lieutenants openly spoke of the north being forced out of Dahomey and of the possibility of secession. Apithy was busy seducing the military with his civil-military plan while Ahomadegbe charged Maga with electoral fraud and claimed that he was the real victor. Zinsou conceded defeat and refused to participate in the various coalition plans.

Tensions mounted and there was a minor exodus of southerners resident in the north and threats of retaliation to northerners living in the south. Negotiations commenced under pressure from the directorate which demanded that the trio come up with a solution to the impasse. After three weeks of hard bargaining and much horsetrading, Maga and Ahomadegbe reached agreement, endorsed by Apithy, on a "presidential council."

The constitutional arrangement provided for a "national" government with the following portfolios apportionment: four for Ahomadegbe men; three each for Maga and Apithy; and Badarou, Zinsou's foreign minister, continuing in that capacity for one year. Each of the three leaders was to serve as president for two years with Maga's term running through May 1972, Ahomadegbe's to 1974, and Apithy's to 1976. All three also pledged not to remain in power beyond their legal term, nor to call upon the army for that purpose. Decisions were to be made unanimously if possible or by a majority on a second vote, and the council was to be "the exclusive repository of legislative and executive power." A purely consultative non-remunerated Assembly was envisaged and later set up in 1972.

The April crisis emphasized the extreme fragility of the Dahomean national fabric and the persistence of vertical ethnic-regional cleavages buttressed by unbreakable patrimonial links between the masses and their chosen elites. The 1970 collegiate arrangement was in a sense a return to the coalition that ruled Dahomey for a brief period in 1960. Since the 1960 coalition had collapsed within a month, the new constitutional arrangement was greeted with great skepticism abroad. There are, however, some important differences between the 1960 and 1970 coalitions.

First, each one of the trio currently has his "constitutional" right to a two-year term of office specified in the agreement signed by all three and nominally approved by the army. Each has something to gain by waiting for his turn; on the other hand, a third of the loaf might not suffice. Factions in the army are restive, moreover, and may intervene, as in the January 1972 mutiny and March 1972 attempted coup (several weeks before Maga resigned).⁵¹

⁵⁰ The reports grossly exaggerated the number of deaths in these clashes, essentially between Maga men and Ahomadegbe campaigners, but my fieldwork in Atakora District in the summer of 1971 revealed that there had been a significant number of clashes resulting from inroads made by Ahomadegbe's appeal in some traditional northern areas largely neglected by all regimes. See Decalo, "Preliminary Comments." Maga would probably have still won an overwhelming victory.

⁵¹ *West Africa*, 17 March 1972.

A second important difference is that a major disagreement among the trio or a unilateral attempt to seize power would invite military intervention and another period of exile which they might not survive. Though, apart from Apithy, the triumvirate is not exactly of retirement age (nor inclined to drop out of the national scene voluntarily), they are all nearing the end of their political careers. Their younger lieutenants are waiting prudently but impatiently, for each leader has a chosen successor. But powerful figures, such as Chabi Mama (the true power in the north who needs Maga less than Maga needs him) and Gabriel Lozes (allied to Ahomadegbe), may well desert their leaders if faced with another period outside the power and patronage network. The precedent exists, as when Chabi Mama lost faith in Maga's chances of returning to power and joined the Zinsou bandwagon in 1969.

Third, important changes have also occurred in the military. Gone or sidelined are some of the major actors of the sixties. Soglo and Aho have retired. Sinzogan has his hands full as head of the police; although on a number of occasions he could have played a major role in coups, he has shied away from the attending risks.⁵² Alley, as secretary general of national defense, and Kouandete, his immediate subordinate (currently under arrest for his role in the March 1972 abortive coup), are not in command positions.⁵³ While Kouandete's ambitions remain and his views on the need for a rigid no-nonsense military regime are well known in Cotonou, he does not have direct access to troops, but this might be a minor consideration in light of his recent utilization of Lieutenant Kitoy's operational command.

Though there are a few middle-rank officers (Hacheme, Chasme, Kerekou) with coup-potential in the now praetorian army, most of the challenge to civilian authority recently has come from ranks below them. Essentially it was the newly promoted captains, lieutenants, and noncommissioned officers who were prominent in the ouster of Soglo and Zinsou and in the recent mutinies and attempted coup.⁵⁴ Their motivations and/or political inclinations are largely unknown, and they represent a big question mark in the complex network of power and stability in Dahomey today. Hence the mid-1970 structural reorganization of the armed forces, creating four distinct commands, each headed by a Fon with a subordinate (in three

⁵² This view was unanimously confirmed in interviews in Cotonou and Porto Novo, where Sinzogan is viewed as timid.

⁵³ Kouandete was arrested in June 1970 following a crude and haughty attempt to liberate a friend detained by the police for distributing inflammatory leaflets. He was arrested, imprisoned, released, relieved of his duties as chief of staff, and attached to Alley's office. When interviewed in 1971 the two officers who had nearly killed each other in 1968-69 claimed jovially that they were fully reconciled and that the press had exaggerated their disagreements. See *Afrique Nouvelle* 18 June 1970.

⁵⁴ The Ouidah garrison mutiny, for example, was apparently led by a number of adjutants and other junior personnel (Captain Lucien Glele and Lieutenant Kitoy). In the March attempted putsch the following were allegedly involved: Captain Affouda, Sergeant Agboton, and Adjutants Sedagondji and Moumouni (the latter was killed by de Souza during the attack). Two other officers whom qualified observers regard as powerful figures are Captains Michel Aikepe and Janvier Assogba, both stationed in Ouidah.

cases) northern officer, cannot prevent personalist power grabs by the junior ranks.⁵⁵

Unrest in the military has heightened rather than abated since the creation of the presidential council, and praetorian assaults of small cliques against their leaders, civil or military, have become the prime destabilizing factor in Dahomey. While complaints and internal divisions seem to have been at the base of the unrest in several military camps, especially the volatile Ouidah garrison, all the political assaults appear to have been aimed at Ahomadegbe.

On 7 May 1971, when Ahomadegbe was supposed to be on his way to a rally in Abomey (though he remained in Cotonou), an ambush was laid for him along the main road.⁵⁶ The episode's details are murky and Maga originally denied the existence of such a plot, though he evaded reporters' questions about the known factionalism within the army.⁵⁷ On 28 January 1972 yet another incident occurred. A full-scale mutiny erupted in the artillery camp at Ouidah: the commander, Rodriguez, and several other officers were overpowered and the mutineers demanded his replacement as well as that of Chief of Staff de Souza; later the mutineers elected a new commander. The Ouidah revolt was subdued by two officers, sent by the president, who apparently made some pledges and threats, still not fully disclosed.⁵⁸ As in earlier instances of military violence, no disciplinary action was taken.⁵⁹

The Ouidah mutiny was closely followed by a convoluted mutiny cum attempted coup on 23 March which for some time was subject to widely varied interpretations.⁶⁰ Twenty officers and soldiers and a number of civilians were arrested for their part in the dawn assassination attempt on de Souza and efforts to capture strategic positions in Cotonou. The 12-man police and military commission investigating the incident reported there were 2 simultaneous plots and 2 different sets of motivations. The first was a straightforward attempt by Kouandete to seize power through the help of colleagues who had operational command positions and troops at their

⁵⁵ For the new structure and command hierarchy, see *Afrique Nouvelle*, 6 August 1970.

⁵⁶ *West Africa*, 3 December 1971.

⁵⁷ *Afrique Nouvelle*, 25 November 1971.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 February 1972.

⁵⁹ See Ahomadegbe's criticism of this leniency in military incidents in *Forces Populaires* (Cotonou), 3 February 1972.

⁶⁰ Ahomadegbe originally charged that the coup was aimed at him personally (he was scheduled to assume power several weeks later) and that it was masterminded by Maga who, to avoid any suspicion, was about to leave for Paris—an interpretation accepted as possible by *West Africa*, 17 March 1972. The same weekly on 21 April 1972 reported that this view was probably erroneous and that Ahomadegbe had assumed its validity on the basis of snippets of information accumulated by his ubiquitous agents organized as Groupements de Vigilance Republicains. Other preliminary reports stated that the Ouidah garrison had once again mutinied since pledges given them in January had not been fulfilled; later this version was amended and it was stated the Ouidah garrison, on its way north as punishment for the 28 January mutiny, had actually stumbled upon the coup elements and had participated in rounding them up.

disposal (Lieutenant Kitoy, Captain Glele, commander of a unit in Cotonou and brother of a minister under Zinsou, and Captain Boni, a medical officer and former Maga supporter who had threatened the secession of the north after the 1970 aborted elections). Kouandete's goal was simple—to become president. The second plot involved Glele's and Boni's intention to go along with Kouandete until de Souza's assassination, at which time they intended to eliminate Kouandete as well as bring back Zinsou as president.⁶¹ A number of civilian supporters of this second plan were also arrested, including Zinsou's brother; apparently Zinsou himself was not involved in any of the machinations.

As one observer noted, this was the first attempt to use assassination as a method to capture power in the army.⁶² The plotters included an incredible variety of erstwhile Maga supporters, Kouandete followers, Zinsou admirers, discontented adjutants and lower-rank officers, northerners, Fon, and even some of Maga's own Palace Guard. Some joined the attempt out of a desire to be rid of the Old Guard, others out of considerations of personal and professional gain. Unsubstantiated evidence suggests yet another motive: the desire to purge the military of most senior "politicized" officers.⁶³

Kouandete and the other plotters were tried and sentenced to death by a specially convened military court after Dahomey's magistrates categorically refused to constitute a civilian court as prescribed by law. Their refusal was justified on the grounds that, whatever the verdict, the sentence would not be carried out, as past experience had indicated. Hence, trying military officers for capital offenses would only place them in jeopardy since the defendant was likely, in typical Dahomean style, to emerge as chief of state in a future military regime. Possibly no other incident in Dahomey's checkered political history is more indicative of the demoralization of the judiciary before the continuous praetorian assaults against legally constituted authority.

The latest coup attempt emphasizes the extent to which power and authority is slipping from high- to low-ranking officers who have arrogated the right to intervene freely in the political arena for noble and ignoble purposes.⁶⁴ Guarding the regime from these kinds of assaults is extremely difficult, and considering the state of the armed forces, possibly the most important achievement of the presidential council to date has been its survival.

Maga's term of office was not without tensions and problems unrelated to the military. Aware of residual hostility in the south (which had erected a statue commemorating his 1963 ouster), an important decision was reached to divorce unionists' salaries from most austerity measures.⁶⁵ This measure,

⁶¹ *West Africa*, 21 April 1972.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Personal communication from Cotonou.

⁶⁴ Following the attempted coup, mass demonstrations were held in support of the presidential council. Prudently, Maga, in criticizing the personnel involved in the attempt, stressed that the bulk of the army was loyal to the regime.

⁶⁵ *Africa Research Bulletin: Series B: Economic, Financial and Technical* (July 1970). According to Maga such taxes constituted a check on the economy, holding up recovery and adding to the political problems.

greeted with incredulity, has undoubtedly contributed to the unions' relative docility. The policy was made possible by reduced expenditures in other fields, the continuation of the drives against tax evasion, increased revenues from goods imported for smuggling into Nigeria, the continuation of French aid, and improvement of the Dahomean economy.⁶⁶ Thus, despite an anticipated record budgetary deficit of 1,486 million CFA francs in 1970, a surplus of 429 million CFA francs emerged. Minimization of estimated receipts and maximization of estimated expenditures for 1971 similarly "transformed," according to Finance Minister Chabi Kao, a 1,300 million deficit to a 570 million surplus, with a similar surplus expected for 1972.⁶⁷ Further exploration of the coast is also being undertaken after Union Oil of California decided not to exploit the offshore oil shales. The relaxed economic picture has also allowed the reemergence of the "style Maga" with its lavish expenditures, the maintenance of three residences and three Mercedes-300 cars for the triumvirate and their staff, the rotation in the site of the independence celebrations, and the yearly celebration of the presidential council's inauguration.⁶⁸ With unionists fully savoring the end of the lean years and gaining additional concessions whenever they choose to apply pressure, the major threats to the presidential council and its cohesion now come from interelite strife within the council and the by now seasonal eruptions of students.⁶⁹

That strife has materialized was to be expected, but it has not resulted in the council's collapse for the reasons noted earlier. From the beginning Apithy found himself excluded by a *de facto* Maga-Ahomadegbe coalition. On several important issues Apithy's views and Porto Novo's interests have been overruled in favor of pro-north or pro-Abomey decisions. In at least one instance, when it was decided to locate the new national university in Abomey-Calavi (near Cotonou) instead of in Porto Novo as recommended by a French technical mission, Apithy stormed out of the council meeting in rage and disgust.⁷⁰ Similar incidents, combined with Maga-Ahomadegbe friction, have at times brought the council to the verge of breakdown. Shortly before Maga stepped down, Ahomadegbe overreacted to several military incidents which seemed designed to keep Maga in power and gave vent to violent criticism of the council and its activities, of corruption in government, and of the lack of meaningful national unification and socio-economic progress.⁷¹

⁶⁶ *Le Monde*, 2 February 1971, reported that, although not growing it, Dahomey nevertheless exported 800 tons of cocoa in 1970-71; Cotonou shipping had increased significantly, as had cotton production in the north; and textile production had tripled.

⁶⁷ *West Africa*, 11 February 1972.

⁶⁸ In 1971 they were held in Parakou where limited accommodations for the influx of foreign dignitaries and officials necessitated major construction work and expenditures that hardly satisfied the need. The rotation in sites (in 1972 the site was Porto Novo) served a legitimizing purpose and was especially appreciated in Parakou, as I can attest. Civil servants were also given one-month salary in advance in order to celebrate the occasion more festively.

⁶⁹ For examples of concessions to unions, see *West Africa*, 11 February 1972, and *Afrique Nouvelle*, 18 November 1971.

⁷⁰ *West Africa*, 12 December 1970. For another rift see *Afrique Nouvelle*, 25 March 1971.

⁷¹ His vitriolic comments first appeared in the Ahomadegbe-leaning mimeographed Cotonou weekly, *Forces Populaires*, 3 February 1972, extracts of which were reprinted in *Afrique Nouvelle*, 28 February 1972.

The continuous student challenge to governmental authority resulted in a number of sharp confrontations during 1971-72. A climax was reached on 5 November 1971 when the government banned the progressively politicized and radicalized UGEED (Union Général des Etudiants et Elèves de Dahomey), which had called upon "workers, soldiers and policemen" to "transform Dahomey into a battlefield."⁷² The ban resulted from a strike declared by the union when the minister of national education could not attend an inconveniently timed ultimatum-meeting to discuss educational reforms. Schools obeying the strike call were closed by the government until 19 November when once again (as in Zinsou's days) parents had to accompany their children and sign commitments that they would not undertake further strikes on pain of expulsion from the Dahomean educational system.⁷³ New strikes nevertheless erupted in Abomey on 1 December; initiated by the teachers and joined by the students, they rapidly spread to other urban centers. The students demanded, among other things, lifting the UGEED ban, but Ahomadegbe, as acting president, reiterated that the UGEED would not be reconstituted because he and the judiciary believed that it "could become a subversive organization led by some politicians . . . [intending] to seize power through organized unrest and disorder." Parents were urged to take charge of their "intoxicated students, drugged, seized by a collective hysteria," and all prefects were ordered to organize vigilance committees to track down "anarchists, rumour-mongers and distributors of leaflets."⁷⁴ Consequently mass rallies were organized by the triumvirate to support their position. Though the strike abated and school reopened, student tempers are still simmering and UGEED organizers (linked to politically ambitious elements which resent the trio's domination of the power hierarchy) are still around.

The fact that 7 May 1972 peacefully ushered in a new president can only be regarded as a modest step towards stability in Dahomey. The rapid deterioration of order, the challenge to the supposedly invincible triumvirate, and especially the myriad of competing personal and corporate factions, civil and military alike, within the context of a praetorian system, make the establishment of a stable political order in Dahomey a particularly difficult and possibly intractable task.

Postscript

On 26 October 1972 Major Mathieu Kerekou brought down Dahomey's Fourth Republic as his Ouidah-based armored column smashed through the presidency's ornate gates and shot its way (inflicting no casualties) into the cabinet meeting then in session.

Justifying the coup over the radio, Kerekou argued that the "three headed figure [was] truly a monster" and that triumvirate rule had been marked by "congenital deficiency . . . notorious inefficiency and . . . unpardonable incompetence," apart from lesser flaws such as patronage,

⁷² *Africa Research Bulletin: Series A: Political, Social and Cultural* (December 1971).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *West Africa*, 17 December 1971. See also *Afrique Nouvelle*, 16 December 1971.

nepotism, and corruption.⁷⁵ "Divided and undermined by their own contradictions, and condemned to inertia," the regime was deemed to have failed in its tasks.⁷⁶ Consequently an all-military government was set up with Kerekou as president and minister of defense and planning. The other portfolios were divided, with some attempt at regional representation, among officers below the rank of colonel—a total of four majors (including Kerekou), seven captains, and one adjutant intendant. Key appointments were Captains Michel Aikpe (minister of interior and security) and Janvier Assogba (minister of civil service), both young militant Fon from the Abomey region.⁷⁷ Though Kouandete was promptly released from prison (neither Maga nor Ahomadegbe had dared to execute the death sentence which was supposed to be carried out within 24 hours of its delivery, justifying in a sense the timidity of the judiciary), neither he nor the other six colonels in the army were appointed to any important governmental position.⁷⁸ On the other hand an advisory assembly, composed of 100 delegates from all sections of the population, was set up to recommend policies to the new regime.

Though it is too early to evaluate the motives and performance of the new junta, the coup was only a natural continuation of the process of erosion of civil and political authority in Dahomey. The regime may exhibit a certain amount of stability in the short run, but it carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. Though it is usually foolhardy, or at best hazardous, to predict events in Dahomey, it is quite possible that the recent coup marks the end of the political careers of Dahomey's triumvirate.

⁷⁵ *West Africa*, 6 November 1972.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ See fn. 54.

⁷⁸ See *West Africa*, 20 November 1972, for some of the appointments.

